

“Like Old Folk Songs Handed Down from Generation to Generation”: History, Canon, and Community in B-boy Culture

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Over the last two decades, I have seen people engage in b-boying¹—also known as breakdancing, the preeminent form of hip-hop dance—in formal and informal situations, on the East and West Coasts, in the North and the South, in gymnasiums and in clubs, in subway stations, in theaters, and on the street. And I can count on one hand the number of such performances I’ve seen during which the song “Apache,” by the Incredible Bongo Band, was not played.

Every hip-hop deejay knows the cuts that b-boys favor: a few energetic, bongo-laden tracks from the early seventies: “Apache” (1973), “Give It Up or Turn It a Loose” by James Brown (1969), “T Plays It Cool” by Marvin Gaye (1972), “It’s Just Begun” by the Jimmy Castor Bunch (1972), “The Mexican” by Babe Ruth (1972) and a handful of others. These songs can be heard at any b-boy event, on the soundtrack to virtually any video that shows b-boying, and on a variety of b-boy-oriented mixtapes and compact discs.

These are not hip-hop songs. They are the rock and funk songs that b-boying’s originators danced to in the half-decade between hip-hop’s emergence as a socio-cultural movement around 1974 and the development of an associated musical genre in 1979.² For those who see hip-hop as a wild, anarchic expression of youthful abandon, brutal materialism, criminality, or even political change, this adherence to convention may seem odd. Could today’s rebellious b-boys really be so mindful of history, and so culturally conservative, that they insist on dancing to the exact records that brought the form to life thirty years ago, long before most of them were even born?

In both scholarly writing and the popular press, notions of rupture are widely presumed to be fundamental to hip-hop culture. An implicit corollary

1 of this premise is that any social or cultural coherence that can be found in
2 hip-hop is primarily a result of common opposition among practitioners to
3 some outside force. Whether these strange bedfellows are using their shared
4 aesthetic of disjuncture to address concerns in the social (Erskine 2003, Rose
5 1994), musical (Krimms 2000, Lipsitz 1994, Walser 1995), or ideological (Perry
6 2004, Potter 1995) spheres, the essential mechanism remains reactionary. In
7 cases where active cultural continuity is emphasized, it is to be found in hip-
8 hop's relationship to broader cultural patterns, such as gender (Gaunt 2006),
9 Afro-diasporic identity (Keyes 1996, 2004), and *latinidad* (Rivera 2003). But
10 hip-hop culture is now over three decades old; does it not have its own in-
11 ternal continuities?

12 If it does not, then hip-hop constitutes not only a new musical genre, but
13 also a truly new *kind* of cultural practice. But if it does—and it certainly seems
14 to—we should not shy away from applying the methodologies and theoretic-
15 al models of ethnomusicology to its study. Nor should we retreat from the
16 commonalities that such methodologies may reveal between hip-hop and
17 other musical practices around the world. In other words, the question is
18 not so much *whether* hip-hop has developed its own conventions, stylistic
19 norms and historical self-consciousness, but *how* it has done so.

20 In order to address these issues, I have engaged in participant observation
21 in New York City's b-boy community since 2003, although this was not my
22 first exposure to the tradition. I have been involved in hip-hop as a listener
23 since 1987, and as a writer, academic, and “bedroom producer” since the
24 early 1990s, all of which have led me to attend hundreds of events at which
25 b-boying was practiced. Over the last two years, I have learned to perform the
26 dance, primarily by attending open practices run by King Uprock (Dynasty
27 Rockers) at P.S. 93 in Ridgewood, Queens, but also by learning individual
28 moves and concepts from—among others—Geo Matrix (Rock Steady Crew),
29 Break Easy (Breakin' in Style Crew), Tiny Love (Breakin' in Style Crew), and
30 Alien Ness (Zulu Kings). I now dance regularly at b-boy events throughout
31 New York City.

32 In the pages that follow, I have tried to convey my experience within the
33 New York b-boy scene as an engagement that is both social and intellectual
34 in the minds of all concerned. Specifically, I have emphasized the voices
35 of my consultants to a degree that is in some ways more typical of an oral
36 history approach than an academic ethnography (cf. Spradley 1979, Ritchie
37 2003). I have done this not out of dissatisfaction with the conventions of
38 ethnomusicological writing, but rather because I feel that, in this case, such an
39 approach best serves these conventions. As this discourse is almost entirely
40 undocumented either in academic or popular writing, I feel that it is impor-
41 tant to present the actual words of the community as much as possible, both
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for documentary purposes and also as indicators of the conceptual universe represented by b-boy discourse.

B-boying—known to popular audiences as “breakdancing”³—is a dance form that developed in New York City in the early 1970s. Although it originally emerged in the context of block parties and so-called “park jams” where a variety of popular dances were performed, b-boying now exists primarily in the context of “battles,” or formal contests at which b-boying is the primary style performed and virtually all attendees are b-boys and b-girls.

Battles take place in open spaces that hold several hundred people, usually gymnasiums, but also nightclubs, private spaces, and, in warmer months, outdoor venues with flat surfaces, such as basketball courts. A battle will usually last a total of about six hours, with a deejay playing appropriate music throughout. In fact, almost by definition, the event begins when the deejay starts playing records and ends when he or she stops. The battle proper usually accounts for only about a third of the event’s running time, while the remainder is spent socializing, warming up, practicing, and dancing informally.

Although virtually everyone who attends such events is a b-boy or b-girl, not all will actually participate in the battle. Many are content to participate in the other aforementioned activities. The vast majority of battles are held on Saturdays, as these tend to be days when people are willing and able to socialize for a whole afternoon or evening, and the venues—especially gymnasiums—are available for rental.

Battles consist of competitors (individuals or groups) taking turns dancing within a circle of onlookers for a pre-determined number of rounds, at the end of which designated judges decide the winner. Winners of each contest compete against other winners until a champion is decided. Champions are usually awarded a trophy and cash prize, drawn from sponsorships or admission fees. While the formal battle is taking place, others will often take advantage of the music to form their own informal circles on its periphery.

The circle of observers, in the center of which b-boys and b-girls take turns dancing, is called the “cypher.” The term comes from the Nation of Gods and Earths (known colloquially as the “Five Percenters”), an offshoot of the Nation of Islam, whose terminology has been extremely influential in New York hip-hop (Allah 1993, Miyakawa 2005). Gods and Earths use the term “cypher” to represent anything associated with circles or cycles, including the numeral “zero,” the letter “O,” the Earth’s orbit, and especially circles of people. It is this usage in particular that has made its way into hip-hop, most commonly referring to any hip-hop activity that is performed in a circle, particularly rapping and b-boying. Rhetorically, it is often referred to as “the” cypher, rather than “a” cypher, which suggests that all cyphers are, in some

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1 abstract way, connected. B-boys and b-girls view the cypher with an almost
 2 mystical reverence, befitting its status as the most authentic, challenging, and
 3 “raw” environment for b-boying.⁴

4 Generally speaking, the deejays who play the recorded music for b-boy
 5 events also perform in nightclubs. Deejaying for b-boys, however, is viewed as
 6 a specific skill in the hip-hop deejay’s toolkit, and it requires a wide array of
 7 abilities, resources, and specific contextual knowledge. These include having
 8 the right records at one’s disposal, knowing how to structure the flow of an
 9 event, and knowing when to change records. (For example, in a battle, a good
 10 deejay will usually keep the same record playing through both competitors’
 11 turns, so that one does not have the unfair advantage of dancing to a better
 12 song.)

13 As with any competitive endeavor, it is important that battles be seen as
 14 being run fairly, as suggestions of bias naturally devalue the accomplishments
 15 of the winners. In the case of b-boying, this tendency specifically works to de-
 16 emphasize demographic issues, whether of age, ethnicity, geographic origin,
 17 or otherwise. To suggest that someone should be looked upon more favor-
 18 ably due to their cultural background, for example, would be taken to imply
 19 that they couldn’t prevail on the basis of skill alone. Conversely, to suggest
 20 that an opponent should be judged negatively due to his or her age, gender,
 21 or ethnicity, would be viewed as an indirect—and somewhat pathetic—ad-
 22 mission of the judger’s own inferiority. This egalitarianism, of course, does
 23 not mean that cultural preferences are absent, only that they are integrated
 24 into the competitive environment through less overt means, such as the way
 25 competition is framed. One of these framing devices is the establishment of
 26 a discrete set of preferred records to which one is expected to dance.

27 28 **The B-boy Canon** 29

30 B-boy songs hold several elements in common: they tend to feature Latin
 31 percussion (especially bongos), have relatively fast tempos (110 to 120 beats
 32 per minute), use horns and guitars in a percussive way, use stop-time at vari-
 33 ous points in the song, and feature a formal structure that builds to decisive
 34 musical peaks. But, most importantly, they have breaks.

35 A break is a moment in the song when the melodic instruments drop
 36 out, leaving only the drums (and sometimes the bass) to articulate the song’s
 37 basic rhythm. As Rose notes:

38 Dubbed the “best part of a great record” by Grandmaster Flash, one of rap’s pion-
 39 eering DJs, the break beat is a section where “the band breaks down, the rhythm
 40 section is isolated, basically where the bass guitar and drummer take solos.” . . .
 41 These break beats are points of rupture in their former contexts, points at which
 42 the thematic elements of a musical piece are suspended and the underlying

rhythms are brought center stage. In the early stages of rap, these break beats formed the core of rap DJ's mixing strategies. (Rose 1994:74)

B-boy records were songs that had breaks that—in a very visceral way—impelled b-boys to dance.

In discussing a somewhat different phenomenon, the syncopation of samba rhythms, Barbara Browning has articulated a fundamental aspect of the relationship between movement and “suppressed” elements of a composition:

This suspension leaves the body with a hunger that can only be satisfied by filling the silence with motion. Samba, the dance, cannot exist without the suppression of a strong beat . . . In fact, the breaks in rhythmic structure, the ruptures in the pattern are the points at which the full complexity of the original pattern becomes evident. But the break precisely points out all that was inherent or potential in the texture before the tear. (Browning 1995:9-10)

Browning is addressing a rupture in rhythm created by suppressing particular beats, while the break is a rupture in form created by suppressing particular instruments (and, by extension, their melodic and rhythmic contributions to the groove). In both cases, the suppression serves to accentuate musical absences, creating a sense that a contribution is required from listeners to restore the music to its proper state. In both cases, that contribution takes the form of dance.

In the case of b-boy songs, the required contribution is an ineffably confrontational energy manifested through the b-boy dance. The tempo, intensity, and aggressive feel of these songs elicit battling rather than socializing, as Zulu King b-boy Alien Ness attests:

I can't break to happy songs. My stuff has to be all down . . . That's what I like. I like down. I like “car chase” music, you know what I mean? Now one of my favorite songs in the whole wide world is [The Jackson Sisters'] “I Believe in Miracles.” I will dance to that song all night. Let the deejay play it all night, I will dance to it all night. Will you see me breaking to it? *Hell* no. Why? . . . It's happy. That's how I feel when I hear that song. I feel happy. I feel good. I don't feel like breakin' . . . That's not something I'm trying to rip somebody's head off in a cypher on. (p.c.)

One song that does feature the qualities Ness seeks is 1972's “It's Just Begun,” by the Jimmy Castor Bunch. Ness continues:

“Just Begun” is the *epitome*. “Just Begun” *personifies* the b-boy mentality. From the opening words to the final words: “Watch me now/Feel the groove/Into something/Gonna make you move.” That's *gangsta*. That's exactly how you feel when you breakin'. I don't care what song you're breakin' to. But when you're breaking, subconsciously you're singing “Just Begun” in your head. Subconsciously, you understand what I'm saying. 'Cause it's the b-boy mentality.

1 Fabel, Senior Vice President of the best-known b-boy organization, Rock
 2 Steady Crew, emphasizes the sheer intensity of the song's musical setting, say-
 3 ing, "'Just Begun' sounds like a bat outta hell! It's like a car chase, you know?
 4 Like a *crazy* car chase! . . . So imagine trying to dance to that intensity!" (p.c.).
 5 Not surprisingly, these are precisely the qualities that make a song eligible
 6 for consideration as a b-boy song.

7 Eddie Luna, founder of the Dynamic Rockers, agrees that these songs
 8 are distinguished by the emotions they spark in b-boys. In fact, he told me,
 9 the songs are so powerful that they can make b-boys dance when they don't
 10 even want to:

11 That is the adrenaline. If you know b-boying, that's like *antbems*, you know? This
 12 is where you stand up. This is where you gotta do what you gotta do. I mean,
 13 when I hear—to this day—the beginning of "Just Begun," "Apache," "The Mexi-
 14 can" during its breaks . . . and "Drummer's Beat," when it starts, when you hear
 15 those bongos going, it's just—oh, *man!* It's *war time*. It is. It's just this *rush* . . .
 16 Like, you don't care no more, you just go ahead and *do it*. Doesn't matter what it
 17 costs! You didn't even practice this move! You're at the point, I mean, whatever
 18 comes out is gonna come out, you know what I mean? You have a black eye or
 19 a scratched arm or whatever. Because the adrenaline rush that you get from the
 20 music . . . "Apache"? Forget it! I can't listen to Apache. I just—I start sweating, you
 21 know! And I get angry! And it's like, I wanna hit the floor!

22 And yet there were other songs recorded in the early 1970s that had
 23 similar qualities, but which are not considered b-boy cuts (many of the re-
 24 cordings of Santana, for example). This exclusion is apparently a result of a
 25 series of lost decisions that were made by hip-hop practitioners at that time.
 26 In other words, we may not understand or remember why one song was in-
 27 cluded and another was not, but it is too late to go back and change it now.
 28 The fact that these choices are still adhered to thirty years later suggests a
 29 deep respect for the community that made those decisions, as well as for the
 30 tradition that has preserved them over the ensuing three decades. In fact, as
 31 Bohlman (1992:204) points out with regard to the European art tradition,
 32 the reason why one would single out songs in the first place is precisely to
 33 define a vision of the past that has utility in the present. "Perceptible in a
 34 work of music," he writes, "should be some model of the past, expressed as
 35 formal similarity, aesthetic context, or mythological purity," all of which obtain
 36 in the case of b-boy songs.

37 As Fabel reflects, b-boys do view the use of these particular songs as a
 38 cultural tradition, an outlook that he explicitly ties to that of a broader Afro-
 39 Caribbean worldview:

40 For the younger people, I think those who have had the privilege to watch older
 41 people get down to it, that's a definite inspiration. The minute you see it, you're
 42 gonna say, "Wow, that makes sense." Just like when you see someone doing real
 dope mamboing to mambo music, or a salsa dancer who's right on. You know

... it's the native music of the dance ... the old-timers do it and still love it and keep it alive, because, honestly, I think that it's part of the ritual.

[Like] when certain drummers drum the same patterns, whether it's *gua-guancó* or whatever: for Afro-Caribbean communities and people who sort of keep folkloric culture alive, there's no questioning about, "Hey, are we gonna break the pattern?" Maybe they'll build on top of the foundation, but the main base of it all is still the same ... So I think the young people do it because they see the value in its tradition. (p.c.)

The Dynamic Rockers' KaoticBlaze, a twenty-one-year-old New York b-girl, confirms this attitude:

It's important, in the aspect that it does have history behind it. And to think that you're getting down to the same beats that the pioneers of the dance got down to before. Like the killa beats from back in the day ... it's important to remember not to forget songs like that. It's history. (p.c.)

B-girl Emiko, who was raised in Japan and is also in her twenties, expresses a similar outlook:

That gives me the ... hypeness. Especially the "Just Begun." It's just one of the songs. Being the b-girl or b-boy, no matter where you're from, once you listen to the song, you just get *crazy!* I don't know the reason why. I didn't live in the time when the music came, but I just feel it—feel that energy of the music. Just say "Aah!," just start battle rock to each other. (p.c.)

DJ E-Rok, who often performs at b-boy events, also emphasizes the idea of tradition, comparing b-boy songs to "folk songs":

JS: There's probably a lot of tunes that you *could* b-boy to, but there's like five songs that people *always* play, you know what I mean? Why do think that is?

E-Rok: You're talking about, like, "Apache"? "It's Just Begun"? I think those are just handed down from generation to generation. Say, like, if you're a kid who's b-boying, you're looking up to the older generation, who you're getting your learning from. And you're watching how they dance. But then you're also listening to the type of music they're playing. You become accustomed to dancing to that particular song. So it's almost like old folk songs handed down from generation to generation.⁵ (p.c.)

DJ DV-One suggests a more abstract idea of "energy," which seems to conflate rhythm and social history into single concept:

I'm sure there's [other] upbeat songs that you can dance to or that you can break to, but it just doesn't feel the same. If you're on the inside—like, if you're a hip-hop head—even a fifteen-year-old could feel the energy in "The Mexican" or in "Apache." You know, you can feel that. I'm sure you can find some, like, house record or even some R&B record ... that has the same tempo or the same speed. It's just not the same as b-boying to the original joints. (p.c.)

Note that DV-One specifies that the listener must be "on the inside" to feel the "energy" of the b-boy songs. In other words, their value, while powerful,

1 is not inherent; one must have some pre-existing knowledge to be able to
 2 appreciate it. And part of what one is appreciating lies in the play between
 3 the practical value of the song as it's being danced to *right now* and the
 4 historical value it carries as a hip-hop classic.

5 It seems to me that a productive way to address this interplay, as sug-
 6 gested earlier, is by viewing these songs collectively as a canon. As Edgar and
 7 Sedgwick observe, the term "canon" has several distinct connotations:

8 Typically, the term is used to encompass what are generally recognized as the
 9 most important works in a particular artistic tradition (most usually of literature
 10 or music). It is derived from its original use, dating from the fourth century, to
 11 refer to the authoritative and definitive books of the Christian Bible. Defenders
 12 of the notion of a canon would argue from the position that there are universal
 13 aesthetic values (albeit that these values may unfold over time, with the develop-
 14 ment of the tradition). Individual works are therefore included in the canon on
 15 the grounds that they best express these universal values. The canonical works
 16 are therefore the finest expression of a particular language, and may indeed be
 17 taken as the expression of a culture's or a nation's identity. (Edgar and Sedgwick
 18 1999:51-52)

19 There are a number of reasons why b-boy songs could be viewed as a
 20 canon. First, the group is a collection of specific songs, as opposed to a ge-
 21 neric profile or type of song that is good to b-boy to. Secondly, the songs are
 22 described via a discourse of quality; they are presented as being "the finest
 23 expression" of the b-boy songs genre. Third, the fact that b-boys would want
 24 to specify the finest expression of the genre in the first place requires agree-
 25 ment about both the values of the community and, more fundamentally, the
 26 actual existence of a community of b-boys. Fourth, the status of the songs is
 27 axiomatic. That is, elements of the canon cannot be questioned, because the
 28 criteria for what makes a good b-boy song are derived from these examples
 29 in the first place.

30 If we view these records as being analogous to "texts," Robert Alter's
 31 comments on the Biblical canon are useful:

32 A canon is above all a transhistorical textual community. Knowledge of the
 33 received texts and recourse to them constitute the community, but the texts do
 34 not have a single, authoritative meaning, however much the established spokes-
 35 men for the canon at any given moment may claim that is the case. After all,
 36 even within the community of traditional believers, the biblical canon has been
 37 imagined to endorse as a matter of divine revelation rationalism, mysticism,
 38 nationalism, universalism, asceticism, sensualism, determinism, free will, and a
 39 good deal else. (Alter 2000:5)

40 But what gives these interpretations both their power and their audi-
 41 ence is their derivation from the canonical texts. In other words, it is the
 42 canon itself that allows such a diversity of opinion to assemble itself under
 the single term "the community of traditional believers."

Literary theorists in particular have made valuable analyses of the ways in which canons—particularly the Western literary canon—reflect the social and ideological relationships between art and community (see Guillory 1993). In the case of the b-boy canon, negotiations are mainly embodied in, and mediated by, the relationship between b-boys and the disc jockeys who provide the music for them to dance to, many of whom are themselves current or former b-boys or b-girls.

Guillory's comments with regard to the Western literary canon are particularly relevant to the question of how contemporary b-boying practice is related to the idea of a "classic b-boy songs" canon:

The canon is itself a historical event; it belongs to the history of the school. If there is now a need to rethink and revise what we do with the curriculum of literature, this project will entail not only reading new works, or noncanonical works (both of which it should entail), but also reading in a better way, by which I mean reading works for what they say and do in their place and time, as well as reading the *difference* between those meanings and the meanings which have been imputed to them by virtue of their being canonical works. (Guillory 1990:244)

The b-boy canon is ripe for such a reading because the *idea* of canonicity—of tradition—actually plays an integral role in the musical practice. Specifically, b-boy songs operate as familiar "frameworks for invention," in a manner analogous to the role that so-called "standards" play for jazz musicians. Paul Berliner writes:

Lee Konitz [states that he] has performed standard compositions "like 'All the Things You Are' for over forty years now" because of their unlimited substance as frameworks for invention, inspiring him to probe ever more deeply into their "possibilities." And Charlie Parker explained to Red Rodney that he routinely practiced formulating solos "on the blues, 'Rhythm' and 'Cherokee' in every key." Over artists' lives, mastery of form resulting from the repeated performance of favorite compositions obviously contributes to their extraordinary fluency as soloists. Konitz adds that improvising on familiar repertory also serves players "as a measuring device" for assessing their creative powers "at that moment" in relation to their recollection of their past improvisations on the composition. (Berliner 1994:226-27)⁶

Similarly, b-boy songs are valued as "frameworks" for the act of b-boying, because they combine practical factors that facilitate the particular dance style (including fast tempos, loud drums, rhythmic horn passages, and breaks) with socio-historical associations that place any given performance in the context of b-boy history. A good deejay, then, is one who is able to properly deploy these factors to help the b-boys accomplish their goals for the dance. In other words, the interaction is not simply one of b-boys appreciating the deejays' choices on an abstract aesthetic level. Rather, it is the deejay giving

1 the b-boys the tools to express themselves and the b-boys validating the
 2 deejays' choices by making use of those materials.

3 In addition to the pragmatic value of the rhythm fitting the steps of the
 4 dance (which I discuss below), a major part of a given song's value as raw
 5 material for performance is that it is canonical—that it is known to be a b-
 6 boy song. This valuing is especially striking when one considers that none of
 7 these songs was originally written or recorded for this purpose. Their status
 8 as b-boy classics was something that developed organically as a result of the
 9 relationship between deejays and b-boys.

10 In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that hip-hop itself was a result of this
 11 relationship. The earliest b-boys danced to these songs in their entirety, saving
 12 their best (or most hostile) moves for the break. It was this practice that led
 13 deejays to focus on the breaks in the first place. This focus soon led to the
 14 innovation, credited to DJ Kool Herc, of using two copies of the same record
 15 on two turntables, a process which enabled the deejay to repeat a given
 16 break endlessly, by rewinding one copy while the other was playing. It was
 17 the deejays' recognition of, and service to, the b-boys' needs that prompted
 18 the birth of hip-hop as a discrete performance practice (see Schloss 2004).

19 As Nelson George has noted:

20 Records such as Jimmy Castor's "It's Just Begun," the Incredible Bongo Band's
 21 "Apache," and Herman Kelly's "Dance to the Drummer's Beat" didn't become hip
 22 hop classics in a vacuum. DJs played them, and often unearthed them, but it was
 23 the dancers who certified them. It was their taste, their affirmation of certain tracks
 24 as good for breaking, and their demand to hear them at parties that influenced the
 25 DJ's and MCs who pioneered hip hop's early sound. (George 1998:16)

26 One example of this "certification" process is the case of the 1972 record-
 27 ing "The Mexican" (performed by British rock band Babe Ruth), which New
 28 York b-boy GeoMatrix explains is specifically "for" uprock—an aggressive
 29 precursor to b-boying in which an individual directly confronts an opponent
 30 who is dancing simultaneously. He says:

31 "The Mexican" one, more for fighting. The Brooklyn uprock—. . . really, people
 32 don't really break to it, but they just uprock to it. . . . That's the type of song, you
 33 just wanna uprock. Like when you doing "Mexican," man, you always wanna go
 34 out there and just *fight*. Like *battling*. (p.c.)

35 Although the song's performers had certainly never heard of hip-hop or
 36 uprocking when they recorded it (since hip-hop didn't exist and uprocking
 37 was limited to teenagers in a few neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the Bronx),
 38 "The Mexican" has become so associated with uprock that when GeoMatrix
 39 hears it, he is immediately filled with an aggressive competitiveness that
 40 compels him to perform the dance.
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In fact, shortly after conducting that interview, I attended the Universal Zulu Nation's 30th Anniversary celebration in Harlem.⁷ At one point in the evening, the deejay played "The Mexican," and b-boys in the crowd began uprocking within five seconds. This response suggests that the association of this particular song with this particular dance is literally embodied knowledge; when "The Mexican" is played, a b-boy or b-girl's body is simply inclined to uprock.

The idea of uprocking as a pre-conscious—though learned—*physical* response to hearing "The Mexican" is consistent with Bourdieu's notion of the habitus as a "system of dispositions" (1977:82) or an "acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted" (1977:95). In fact, Ken Swift, considered one of the foremost authorities on b-boy practice, sees the development of a b-boy habitus as the central value of designating a canon in the first place:

I think it's important to know those songs. Cause you never know when they're gonna come up . . . You don't want to think about the song. You wanna react to the song without thinking about it. (p.c.)

In Swift's opinion, the existence of an agreed-upon corpus of b-boy songs allows dancers to develop the ability to react instantaneously to each in a manner that reproduces the aesthetic principles of the b-boy community. From the moment this ability becomes a part of any given breaker's disposition, that individual carries a piece of hip-hop history in his or her physical being and recapitulates it every time he or she dances.⁸

In addition to the general emotional power of a song like "The Mexican," a good dancer also responds to the lyrics, the interesting musical figures, and the pulse of the rhythm. In the case of uprock specifically, Fabel notes, these musical details are associated with the use of "burners" or dance moves that were designed to insult an opponent by miming physical attacks:

The songs in particular that have drum rolls . . . you can machine gun someone down on that part.⁹ Certain yells, you know, you could jump up and grab their head and pull it towards your crotch, or pretend you did. Those were the moves back then. The real sort of insulting burners, you know? The way the music was composed and the way the vocalist did a thing over it definitely played a role in choosing hit songs that every deejay was trying to get. (p.c.)

Brooklyn-based uprocker PJAY71 elaborates:

Like in the song "Yellow Sunshine" . . . if I make a motion that I'm . . . letting the rays of the sun shine on my face. That's not a big deal move. It's not a breakdance power-move. But that's important in uprock. It's not the point if it's hard to do. You understand? Just doing it, that's the point. *Knowing when it comes in the song*, knowing to catch the lyric or catch that part of the song. (p.c.)

1 The establishment of a discrete set of b-boy songs aids this process by limiting
 2 the repertoire of songs that dancers need to master, so that they can direct
 3 their energies toward learning the details of each.

4 On a more general level, encouraging b-boys to gear their dancing to a
 5 specific song necessarily promotes the idea that the relationship between
 6 music and dance is important. This relationship is by no means a foregone
 7 conclusion in the b-boy world. The rise of “air moves” and “power moves”
 8 (demonstrating acrobatic ability and strength, respectively) has led to a sig-
 9 nificant portion of b-boying being arrhythmic. For example, the underground
 10 b-boy DVD *Power Moves* (available on breakdance.com, LLC, 2004) contains
 11 instructional material on how to perform these impressive feats, footage
 12 from three b-boy contests (including one called “Chico Got To Get His Share,”
 13 named after a lyric from “The Mexican”), and interviews with well-known
 14 b-boys and b-girls. But the video begins with the following voice over:

15 It’s cool if you’ve got the most incredible power move in the world. That’s cool.
 16 That looks hot. But the shit gotta have neatness to it and structure . . . Remember,
 17 this is a dance . . . This is not a gymnastics event; you not being judged on your
 18 flips and how many flares you do. So remember, this is dance.

19 The promotion of the b-boy canon is a vote in favor of a rhythm-oriented
 20 style of b-boying (as opposed to a gymnastic style).

21 In addition to this general sensibility, the b-boy canon also works to pro-
 22 mote the use of specific rhythms. Uprocking is performed to a rhythm that
 23 b-boys call a “five-count,” which is a framework of five movements set in 4/4
 24 time, with the last three movements being performed at double-speed:¹⁰

25 1-and-2-and 3-4-5-and-1-and-2-and-3-4-5-and etc.

27 Although the actual term “five-count” is of relatively recent vintage, it
 28 does reflect a rhythmic feel that goes back to the earliest days of uprock. It
 29 can easily be viewed as a modified chachachá, which would not be surpris-
 30 ing, given that uprock was created by Puerto Ricans living in Brooklyn in the
 31 late 1960s. As uprocker PJAY71 notes, this affinity reflects the dance’s close
 32 relationship to Latin dance:

33 JS: I was wondering if you saw it as being connected to Latin music.

34 PJAY71: Well, it is. I mean, because . . . funk music and hustle and—we know—
 35 salsa has a lot of Latin flavor to it, so the Latin steps *work*. You know what
 36 I’m saying? There’s a lot of those uprock songs that you could bust a Latin,
 37 total-straight-up-salsa step to it and it would work. You won’t look stupid. It
 38 would totally work with it. On beat, on time, and everything. So, yeah.

39 As previously mentioned, a major aspect of the dance is the act of “throw-
 40 ing burners”—performing mimed acts of violence or sexual domination
 41 towards each other.¹¹ Burners are usually performed on the first or second
 42 count of the five-count, often drawing energy by rising from a quick crouch

on the final beat of the cycle. The crouching, in turn, is given momentum through double-time (“3-4”) movements on the third beat. In other words, the rhythm of the dance is as follows:

1	and	2	and	3	4	5	and	
THROW		step		step—	step	crouch		
1	and	2	and	3	4	5	and	
THROW		step		step—	step	crouch		etc.

Not surprisingly, this is also the primary rhythm of “The Mexican.” The association of this song with this dance clearly serves to maintain the dance’s existing rhythm and, by extension, the shape of its choreography.

When uprocking traveled to the Bronx and became incorporated into the foundation of b-boying,¹² the five-count rhythm remained an integral part of the dance. In fact, most of the specific songs that were associated with uprocking were incorporated into the b-boy canon.

In any case, the association of the five-count with the dance has two effects: it allows the dancer to “lock in” to songs that share the rhythm, and it makes it difficult to dance to songs that do not fit the pattern, especially songs that are too slow. In fact, the speed at which gravity acts on the human body alone exerts a decisive influence over which songs can be used. Of course, the kinetics of gravity are relevant to all dance forms, but are all the more so with b-boying since many of its moves consist of jumps, hops, and shuffles that incorporate leaping or falling. For example, a sequence of movements is sometimes decisively concluded with a “blow-up,” a category of move in which the breaker leaps into a frozen position, usually one that requires a high degree of balance (the most common blow-ups involve variations on a one-handed handstand). For the blow-up to be considered successful, it must be landed precisely on the beat, a feat which requires that gravity be taken into account in two ways: the initial leap must be timed so that the dancer touches down at the right moment, and then the dancer must be able to balance in the position for several beats, returning to his feet at a rhythmically appropriate moment as well.

The most successful blow-ups coincide with decisive beats in the song. At one battle I attended in 2005, in fact, the entire contest was won with such a move. The b-boy leapt into a one-handed handstand and aimed an imaginary gun at his opponent with his free hand; the song to which he was dancing—chosen spontaneously by the deejay—contained a gunshot sound at exactly the moment he assumed the pose.

On a more fundamental level, despite the customary popular association of “breakdancing” with rap, virtually all contemporary hip-hop songs are simply too slow to b-boy to, a fact that becomes clear as Geo Matrix discusses the significance of the canon generally (p.c.):

1 This type of music represent breakin' . . . When you play this type of music, people
 2 already know. And you could play, like, "Apache," already the b-boys gonna to say
 3 to themselves, "This is our music—we gonna go down."¹³ 'Cause nowadays you
 4 can go to a party and you can't break to hip-hop. And [if] you don't give 'em this
 5 type of beat, the b-boys always gonna stay, like, just chillin'. But if you give 'em
 6 that beat, they're like, "Nah, nah I gotta go for it!"

7 The canon, then, is the site of mutual influence: b-boys who wish to maintain
 8 these steps as part of their dance will show a strong preference for b-boy
 9 songs. At the same time, the continued prevalence of b-boy songs preserves
 10 such steps as an integral part of b-boying.

11 Another example of how this process works can be found in toprocking,
 12 an aspect of b-boying which was derived from uprocking in the early 1970's.
 13 Toprocking is the upright, rhythmic cross-stepping that precedes "going
 14 down" to perform breakdancing's characteristic floor moves. The simplest
 15 toprocking step is known as the "Indian Step" and consists of the following
 16 movements, beginning from a stance in which both feet are parallel, about
 17 shoulder width apart:

- 18 1. The right foot crosses in front of the left and takes the body's full
 19 weight.
- 20 2. The weight is shifted back to the left foot, and:
- 21 3. The right foot swings back to a position parallel to the left and takes
 22 the weight again. The dancer has now returned to the original
 23 position. The process is then repeated to the left side.
- 24 4. The left foot crosses in front of the right and takes the body's full
 25 weight, the weight is shifted back to the right foot.
- 26 5. The left foot swings back to a position parallel to the left and takes
 27 the weight again.

28 The step is performed in double-time so the entire process (to both
 29 sides) fills one four-beat musical measure:

30
 31 1 2 3 4
 32 right left right - left right left -
 33 1 2 3 4
 34 right left right - left right left -
 35

36 This rhythm makes physical sense, because it takes twice as long for the
 37 leg to cross over in front as it does to step back (on the one and the three),
 38 since the crossing leg's "return trip" is rhythmically divided by the other foot's
 39 step. When I initially learned this movement, I was explicitly instructed to
 40 associate the rhythm of my steps with the "Boom Boom Bap" rhythm of b-boy
 41 songs (this is the rhythm, for instance, that is played on the bongo drums in
 42 "Apache"):

1		2		3		4		
right	left	right	left	right	left			
boom	boom	bap	boom	boom	bap			
1		2		3		4		
right	left	right	left	right	left			
boom	boom	bap	boom	boom	bap			

Aside from the rhythm, another factor that comes into play in the canon is the formal structure of the songs. As Alien Ness (p.c.) maintains:

There's a time to go down. There's a time to get up. There's a time to stop. There's a time to do it. And when you do it correctly, everything is rhythmically correct. You can't do no wrong. You're always gonna look tight. And it's all in counts . . . I understand rhythms. I understand that everything in funk, 'cause that's where the breakbeats come from, is all on four- or eight-counts. Every four counts, the music changes. So should we. Real simple. Every time the music changes, so should we.

Similarly, when Fabel discusses “Apache,” it is noteworthy that the first thing he mentions is his appreciation for its formal structure:

I love “Apache” because it has a lot of buildups in the song. Well, one main buildup really and that other teaser at the end. The hype of anticipation, a lot of times, is what did it . . . knowing, “Oh shit—here it comes!” And wondering what's gonna jump off, a battle or whatever. Or if anyone in the crowd that you don't know is schemin' on you, you know?

In his comments, Fabel places the specific formal characteristics of “Apache” within a broader social context: the sense of “anticipation” that arises as musical peaks approach is based on the listener having heard the song before; otherwise the beats would not be anticipated. Moreover, the knowledge that these peaks are significant is based on the expectation that certain kinds of social interactions—“a battle or whatever”—will take place at that point in the song.

There is, in fact, a conventional understanding that the high-energy point of the song “Apache” will be the most important moment of any given b-boy event. Anyone who has something significant to do—such as debut a spectacular new move, or resolve a long-simmering dispute with another breaker—will often wait until that point in the evening to do so. This in turn means that when the deejay chooses to play this song, the energy in the room will rise noticeably as b-boys look around and wait to see what will happen. The power of being able to deploy this song at the appropriate time is not something deejays take lightly:

JS: Is there a moment when you know that it's right for that song?

Mr. Supreme: Oh, for sure! Certainly. I mean, just the other night was a perfect example. I just started playing . . . some almost like . . . I was playing some

1 salsa stuff, really, and it had a lotta Latin rhythm and percussion in it and
 2 these cats started b-boying. So I knew: "Yeah, OK, now's the time." And it
 3 worked, you know?

4 From the deejays' point of view, it is the song's dance-floor effectiveness ("It
 5 worked, you know?") that sets it apart. In 2002, for example, hip-hop journalist
 6 Smokey D. Fontaine zeroed in on "Apache"'s power to inspire b-boys when
 7 he listed the song as one of the best singles of the 1970s: "This cornucopia
 8 of psychedelic keyboards, conga drums, and spaghetti western-like trumpet
 9 playing became one of the main building blocks of the break-dancing
 10 movement. Thirty years later, every riff in this manic workout will still incite
 11 spontaneous acts of backspinning at a park near you" (Poulson-Bryant and
 12 Fontaine 2002:7).

13 The ability of this song to move b-boys is apparent as Mr. Supreme con-
 14 tinues:

15 That particular song is *the* b-boy anthem. The *one* . . . I usually have that record
 16 with me, everywhere I go. Just because you never know. It's just one of those
 17 records that I always take with me . . . It's a powerful song, there's lots of energy
 18 in it. The change-ups and the orchestrated [horn] hits and everything.

19 . . . It's the energy of the song and the way that you feel the song. I mean, I'm
 20 an original b-boy, you know what I'm saying? . . . And it's like: feeling that song
 21 within your body, when you hear it, the energy that just—it makes you wanna
 22 dance. More so than any other song.

23 Even, like, the other night, when I was spinning, these guys started b-boying.
 24 Everybody got all happy, they gathered around and there was lots of energy. But
 25 it seemed like—even though there was that much energy—when I dropped
 26 "Apache" there was even *more* energy. It was like the turbo boost.

27 Mr. Supreme cites many valuable aspects that "Apache" offers: its rhythm, its
 28 horn arrangements, its "energy," and the way it seems to animate the human
 29 body. For the deejay, though, all of these aspects are subsumed to its func-
 30 tional value: it can be depended upon to make a good social situation even
 31 better, which is why Mr. Supreme specifies that it is "one of those records
 32 that I always take with me."¹⁴

33 The ability to bring forth fun and energetic social gatherings is the deejay's
 34 stock in trade. Having canonical songs at their disposal is one tactic that
 35 is often utilized, as DJ E-Rok told me:

36 It all depends on the vibe of the moment, the spirit of the energy, and what's
 37 happening at the moment. It's kinda like a half-improvised and half-set-up thing,
 38 the way that I do it. And I'll bring some cuts that are definitely the classic joints,
 39 but then I'll also bring a set of cuts [that] are kinda like warm-up cuts. Say like
 40 if I'm deejaying a b-boying [event], right? If I'm deejaying the whole thing, I'll
 41 definitely bring some warmup cuts. Something not too hype, something just kinda
 42 like mid-tempo, but upbeat at the same time. Get everybody warmed up. But, all
 of a sudden, when I feel and I see the b-boys getting really into it, and you see,

like, two guys or two crews really getting into it and starting to battle, that's when I'll throw on the really hype cuts, the really serious cuts that the b-boys would really enjoy the break to. Whether it's like "Just Begun," "The Mexican," "Apache." It's whatever song at the moment, what the b-boys are feeling. From then, I'll just hit 'em with song after song after song, where it's basically, you know, I just want them to lose their mind when they're breakdancing.

It is useful at this point to compare the work of the contemporary hip-hop deejay to that of the "selector" in Jamaican dancehall music, as described by Stolzoff (2000), from which the role of the hip-hop deejay is derived:¹⁵

Choosing what songs to play . . . is no simple matter. Competent selectors think about tempo, key, texture, genre, mood, and theme, among other things, when deciding which record will follow the one they are playing. These "intelligent" selectors keep the crowd on its toes by the seemingly improvisational ordering of his selections, yet his selections have to "make sense" and are far from random. In actuality, the selector draws on both established sequences of songs as well as spontaneous gut feelings about what song should go next. (Stolzoff 2000:203)

The development of a framework of songs that is responsive to the needs of b-boys at any given moment is the major goal for deejays at b-boy events. Moreover, the ability to deejay b-boy events, once developed, can also be deployed strategically by deejays to bring the b-boy sensibility into other performance environments, such as nightclubs.

Deejay DV-One, for example, introduces this sensibility as a conscious strategy:

Part of being a deejay is being kinda in tune, or really responsive, to what your crowd is doing. So if you're deejaying and then you see someone in the corner b-boying, maybe you play like two or three more b-boy cuts in a row, to see how many other b-boys are there. See who else is gonna start b-boying. Or, you could have people b-boying and come up to you and be like "Yo, play some b-boy cuts." And then that would start off your b-boy set. (DV-One, p.c.)

The deejay, in other words, can use the symbolic power of b-boy songs to create an exciting environment in non-b-boy contexts. One of the hallmarks of a good deejay is that audience members trust their judgment with regard to which songs are appropriate to play at any given time; the deejays know how to "rock a crowd." In other words, their understanding of how music serves various social needs is the primary reason why fans pay money to hear them. While other factors may come into play (such as institutional status, the size and diversity of their record collection, or whether they have a radio show), they are all secondary to the deejay's ability to facilitate positive social situations in general, and a sense of group cohesion in particular.

Again, while a deejay's actions occur in real time, his or her split second decisions are informed by years of experience, as well as by conscious planning. This experience, it is worth noting, is the mirror image of the crowds'

1 experience. What has historically “worked” for deejays is, by definition, what
 2 crowds have enjoyed. And crowds enjoy watching b-boys.

3 Hip-hop is widely viewed as comprising four elements: deejaying, emcee-
 4 ing (rapping), b-boying, and graffiti. Adherence to this “elements” mythology
 5 is one of the primary factors that hip-hop traditionalists use to distinguish
 6 themselves from those they see as having a more superficial interest in the
 7 popular music aspect of hip-hop, which they call “rap.” Taking into account
 8 that, by its nature, graffiti does not come into play in a musical performance,
 9 it is worth noting that rap music is composed of emceeing and deejaying
 10 (or some deejaying substitute). Therefore, an environment that contains only
 11 emceeing and deejaying is a “rap” environment and thus ideologically am-
 12 biguous from the point of view of traditionalists. But an environment that
 13 contains emceeing, deejaying, *and b-boying*, is a “hip-hop” environment, that
 14 is, one concerned with history, tradition, and community values. B-boying
 15 alone is enough to tip the balance. And canonical songs speak to and for the
 16 b-boys. A song like “Apache,” then, can actually alter the environment for all
 17 participants, even those who are not themselves b-boys or b-girls.

18 Moreover, this mechanism, while valued for its own sake, is also viewed
 19 functionally by deejays. If they can use the b-boy canon to create a sense of
 20 group cohesion in the moment, then they can count the evening as a profes-
 21 sional success, a step toward greater respect and earning power. While most
 22 deejays believe their work can be art, they are well aware that an economic
 23 imperative may take precedence if conflicts arise:

24 In your club, you pretty much have to be really really selfless. You know, 'cause
 25 you can't go to a club and play for a crowd of people and expect to play your
 26 personal favorites, because, you know, a lotta people might not be feeling you.
 27 So you have to play pretty much what people wanna hear, and then you have to
 28 manipulate it in a way to where it's the way you like to hear it. So if it's a song
 29 you don't like maybe you can juggle it. Or mix it with a different song or just
 30 speed it up, slow it down, however. But you pretty much have to be selfless and
 31 play to the crowd in a club type setting. (DV-One, p.c.)

32 But not only does this attitude not exclude the promotion of ideas about
 33 tradition, in the case of the b-boy canon, it virtually demands it. As deejay
 34 E-Rok puts it:

35 It's definitely something like a ritual that you do. And it kinda keeps the culture
 36 alive . . . These songs were very important songs of . . . hip-hop culture. And as
 37 a deejay you try to play those songs, and you try to educate that these were the
 38 songs that made a lotta noise during the golden age of hip-hop. And, basically,
 39 you wanna get a crowd response to that. (p.c.)

40 The b-boy canon is a tool of tradition-building as much as it is a result of
 41 it. The existence of a b-boy canon is one of the things that makes b-boying
 42

a single community. By dancing to “Apache” or “It’s Just Begun,” any contemporary breaker is arguing that communal values are shared by anyone who has b-boyed over the last three decades. The fact that such gestures are not unique to hip-hop is not a weakness on hip-hop’s part, but a strength. If hip-hop uses its historical consciousness to achieve the same goals as any other musical culture, that only gives us the opportunity to dig more deeply into the specifics of how it does so, and what those choices can tell us about hip-hop culture, its values, and its concerns.

The existence of a b-boy canon suggests a particular perspective on tradition and a particular way of engaging with it. Specifically, it directly suggests two general premises: that there should be a close relationship between music and choreography; and that this relationship should serve as a conduit that allows b-boys and b-girls to transfer the historical associations of the music to their dance and, by extension, their bodies. To dance well to the chosen songs is to live in hip-hop history, to make evident the connection between a gymnasium in Seattle in 2006 and a park in the Bronx in 1975. The existence of a recognized group of b-boy songs from another era represents a relationship between individual skills and collective history. The b-boy canon serves as an almost spiritual connection between modern proponents and the historical essence of the dance, giving strength, energy and legitimacy to modern devotees. As Alien Ness (p.c.) puts it:

I think, just for the sake of spirituality, you should get into those beats. Because those are the beats that moved the original b-boys, and it had to be for a reason. Without a doubt. So just for spiritual reasons, you should try to get into those beats and really see what it is about that beat that moved people and moves *you*.

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Notes

1. Within the hip-hop community, “b-boy” is the preferred term for what is commonly known as a “breakdancer.” It is also frequently used as a verb: “to b-boy.” Although the noun “b-girl” is used for female breakers, the verb “b-boying” is considered non-gender-specific within the community; hence, b-girls often refer to what they’re doing as “b-boying.” For the sake of clarity, I use “b-boy” here to represent both the activity and dancers of both genders. It should be noted however that b-girls have been central to hip-hop dance from its inception, and I do not wish to minimize their contribution.

1 2. It is often forgotten that hip-hop existed as a culture and performance context for at
 2 least five years before it became a style of music (see Fricke and Ahearn 2002, Chang 2005).

3 3. B-boying saw a brief moment of extreme popularity as an international fad in 1984. Most
 4 contemporary b-boys associate the term "breakdancing" with the more commercial aspects of
 5 b-boying that emerged during that period, and reject the term on that basis. Interestingly, many
 6 older b-boys openly admit that this rejection is a revisionist position and that they used the
 7 term without hesitation at the time. For more information on the history of b-boying, see the
 8 DVD *The Freshest Kids* (Image Entertainment 2002).

9 4. The circle of onlookers as dance space has a well-documented history, having been
 10 used for a variety of dance forms in the US and elsewhere in the African diaspora for capoeira
 11 (Almeida 1986), rumba (Daniel 1995), and other competitive dances. Also, as noted by Thomas
 12 Green in two very intriguing recent articles (both 2003), the circle—and music—is associated
 13 with almost all martial arts of the African diaspora.

14 5. The value of these relationships is manifested in the emphasis b-boys and b-girls place
 15 on their pedagogical lineage. Generally speaking, one's lineage is traced through the individual
 16 from whom one learned one's "foundation," that is, basic moves and general philosophies about
 17 b-boying. Although the person a b-boy or b-girl "got their foundation from" is understood to be
 18 a mentor figure who introduced them to the conceptual building blocks of the dance form, it
 19 is not necessary that this be the first person they studied with. That is, one can learn to break
 20 with some degree of proficiency, and then "go back" and get one's foundation later. There are two
 21 distinguishable reasons why one might do so, though they are often conflated with each other.
 22 First, one may come to believe that one's original style was technically incorrect. Alternatively,
 23 one may secure a better lineage for oneself. That is, if dancers learn to break from a friend or
 24 video, then later have the opportunity to study with a well know b-boy or b-girl, the dancers
 25 can specify that they got their foundation from someone well-respected.

26 6. Standards, as in b-boying, also serve as a "measuring device" for comparing soloists' abilities
 27 to those of other musicians.

28 7. Founded from the ashes of the Black Spades street gang in November of 1973 by DJ
 29 Afrika Bambaataa, the Universal Zulu Nation has become the pre-eminent cultural organization
 30 in hip-hop, maintaining chapters around the world to the present day. Their b-boy division,
 31 the Zulu Kings, were pioneers in b-boy style and technique, and also played a central role in
 32 defining b-boying's relationship to other elements of hip-hop. For more information see www.zulunation.com or Chang 2005.

33 8. In fact, when he introduces "The Mexican" on his underground mix CD *Throwback*
 34 *Breaks and Beats* (Grandmaster Caz 2004), DJ Grandmaster Caz mentions neither the name of
 35 the song nor the artist. As the song begins, he simply declares, "If you don't know what this is,
 36 you don't need to know! You just wasn't there!"

37 9. Conventionally, when b-boys talk about uprocking, they speak as if the mimed attacks
 38 were real, which can be somewhat disconcerting for those unfamiliar with the convention.

39 10. Here, and throughout the paper, I try to represent rhythms as they are conceived of by
 40 b-boys and b-girls.

41 11. The use of the term "throwing" to describe performing a given move or type of move
 42 (e.g., "I was throwing a lot of foundational moves in that battle") is common in b-boy discourse.
 This appears to derive from the battle aesthetic that underlies much of hip-hop practice: one is
 not merely "performing" one's moves; ones is "throwing" them at an opponent, who is expected
 to respond accordingly.

12. Many people in the community disagree about the exact nature of the relationship
 between the two dances. Some feel that uprock was only one of many styles that early b-boys
 drew upon when developing breaking, while others see uprock as breaking's direct progenitor.
 This is a key question because uprocking was developed in Brooklyn around 1968, and b-boying
 was developed in the Bronx around 1973. So, as uprocker Tiny Love succinctly puts it, "If
 breaking came out of uprock, then hip-hop didn't start in the Bronx" (Tiny Love, p.c.).

13. To "go down," or shift from an upright position into one in which one's hands (or back

or head) can contact the floor, is the defining act of b-boying. To go down is to formally commence a given act of b-boying.

14. Of course sometimes this attitude can be taken too far; KaoticBlaze told me:

Honestly, sometimes it's so tiring. Because every time we go to a club, let's say, or a spot that maybe not a lot of breakers go to, but they see a breaker so the deejay will automatically think, "Boom! Put on Jimmy Castor Bunch," or whatever, "put 'Apache'." And then, you know, you're feeling the beat, cause that's like a classic, "Apache," "Just Begun." Those are classic beats. But after a while, it's just like: hearing the same beats over and over again, like for practicing, it doesn't even get you amped anymore.

15. DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican immigrant to the US, introduced the sound system aesthetic to the Bronx in the early 1970s, and developed technical innovations that gave rise to hip-hop (see Hager 1984, Rose 1994, Fricke and Ahearn 2002, Chang 2005).

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